Faculty Perception of Support to Do Their Job Well

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Research has commonly suggested that adequate and appropriate mentoring and faculty perception of support for a work-life balance are important factors in the recruitment, development, and retention of university faculty. To better understand the role of these factors in faculty job performance at teaching universities, faculty from such a university were surveyed about their experiences with these forms of support and the factors that influenced their perception of the ability to do their job well. Results indicate that faculty mentoring was an important predictor for support at the department level. Additionally, perceived work-life balance was a significant factor at the college and university levels.

In the last 20 years, the academy has been pressured to turn the tables on itself and research the academic environment and lives of faculty members. These pressures are based on scrutiny from a wide range of sources including the media, legislatures, administration, and even students themselves. At the same time as public institutions across the country are seeing decreases in financial support, they are seeing increased pressures related to work productivity, student learning (Rosser, 2004), and preparation of graduates for future employment. O'Meara, Terosky, and Newmann's (2008) review of literature suggests that the pervasive themes regarding the "assessments of the current condition of the academic profession" (p. 17) are overwhelmingly negative. In what they refer to as the "narrative of constraint," O'Meara et al. note that the story being told by and about academics focuses not on the many accomplishments of faculty but rather on a lack of support (especially for women and faculty of color), increasing expectations for performance, and the barriers to success. While the story being told about faculty performance is negative, faculty's perception of at least *some* support is still important for them to do their job well. Therefore, it is important that research examine the factors that can contribute to this perception of support, including demographics, mentoring, and a balance between work life and home life. It is equally important that university administration understand this research and implement structural supports for recruiting and retaining faculty.

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Professional development has long been considered necessary for workers across fields to continually improve their work performance. University faculty are no different. At our mid-sized, Midwestern, unionized, public, teaching-focused university, the past ten years have seen dramatic shifts in what faculty professional development encompasses. Changes in the economic security of higher education,

the demographics of incoming faculty, and available technology have all impacted our professional development programs. A decade ago, incoming faculty were welcomed into a faculty-led group mentoring program. This program allowed new faculty across campus to interact with one another, provided access to key players on campus, and provided early-career faculty with a necessary introduction to university life. A good economic situation also allowed grants to be awarded to new faculty for professional development activities, in areas of both teaching and scholarship. However, as the demographics of incoming faculty changed (from early- to mid-career faculty) and the economy turned downward, the face of professional development also changed. More recently, the professional development of faculty (new and midcareer) has been divided among multiple groups. The human resources office now provides an orientation to benefits and the university structure. The faculty union structure provides for workshops and resources regarding tenure and promotion, as well as contractual, annual financial support for professional development activities (primarily travel). And a new faculty-focused technology center provides training and support for various forms of technology. No longer provided are the small-group conversations with colleagues and intimate introductions to administrators.

In light of the ebb and flow of professional development on our campus (and campuses across the country), this study seeks to identify the factors that contribute to support from departments, colleges, and the university as perceived by faculty working to do their jobs well. Faculty members were asked to evaluate the university environment as it pertained to professional development in the context of current workplace practices. This research was completed during a time of administrative transition and immediately following the economic downturn that impacted most public educational institutions.

Review of Literature

Professional Development

As long ago as 1810, when Harvard instituted sabbatical leave, colleges and universities have included professional development as an important institutional goal. Much in these early programs focused largely on increasing research expertise and promoting faculty as scholars in their respective fields. By the 1950s and 1960s, professional development expanded to include a focus on a faculty member's development as a teacher as well as a scholar. Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach (2006) suggested that more recently, the emphasis of professional development has transitioned further to curriculum development, continued preparation, and now networking. This newer focus better reflects the nature of teaching institutions, like ours.

Given this new framework of professional development, faculty now need additional forms of support and resources to develop as both educators and scholars. Sorcinelli (2000) outlines best practices for supporting early-career faculty. Early and frequent communication and feedback, performance review, and flexibility are necessary for promoting productive faculty members. She also notes that professional development strategies need to be individualized rather than "one-size-fits-all." Specifically, she notes the importance of special career guidance and flexible tenure clocks. Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin (2000) suggest that support from senior faculty, chairs, deans, and other campus leaders is imperative to attracting, developing, and retaining faculty. Mentoring by senior faculty and department chairs, advocating for newer faculty members, and providing guidance and resources as they navigate the university systems are all necessary for faculty development. Sorcinelli (2000) also indicates that fostering a balance between the professional and personal lives of faculty augments faculty development.

Faculty Mentoring

In general, faculty members report that the perception of support is crucial to their career development and success. Mentoring is one of the key factors in whether or not faculty feel supported to do their jobs well. Van Eck Peluchette and Jeanquart (2000) found that those who had significant mentoring from multiple sources, whether in the early or middle stages of their careers, experienced the highest levels of both objective and subjective success; those without mentors were likely to experience lower objective and subjective success. Schrodt, Cawyer, and Sanders (2003) show that new faculty who are mentored report greater career satisfaction than those who are not; more specifically, they feel "more connected to their work environments" and express "a greater sense of ownership over their departments" (p. 20) than those who are not mentored.

Faculty mentoring, Sorcinelli (2000) noted, as is the case with faculty development in general, needs to be individualized. For some (i.e., women and faculty of color), mentoring tends to be collectivist or peer mentoring. For others (i.e., white men), it is the traditional one-to-one, senior faculty mentor-to-junior faculty protégé model (Hollenshead & Thomas, 2001). Boyle and Boice (1998) report that although "tradition holds that the best mentoring occurs spontaneously, without intervention by faculty developers" (p. 159), only about one-third of new faculty find such "natural" mentoring; women and minorities are least likely to find such spontaneous mentoring. In contrast, white men are the ones who receive and benefit most from such "natural" mentoring in academia. Wasburn (2007) shows that although formal mentoring programs are often less effective than informal ones, leaving mentoring to chance is not effective, as most faculty will not, in these circumstances, be mentored. Boyle and Boice (1998) argue that systematic mentoring works better than spontaneous, natural mentoring, as it is more regular, longer lasting, and more likely to involve those (both mentors and protégés) who are often left out of "natural" mentoring. An important component of faculty development strategies is to understand the individual needs of faculty, and for faculty developers to craft programs to address these needs.

Faculty Work/Home Balance

Little has been written about the balance between faculty's work life and home life or their perceptions of this work-life balance. Instead, the literature overwhelmingly addresses only the worklife of faculty. In fact, some research has referred to homelife simply as life away from work (Sorcinelli & Near, 1989). Research on worklife has previously focused on quality of worklife (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002), satisfaction (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Rosser, 2005) and retention (Johnsrud & Heck, 1994; Matier, 1990; Rosser, 2004; Smart, 1990). These areas of worklife have been conceptualized in different ways. To be sure, quality of worklife and faculty satisfaction with their jobs will likely influence retention rates, especially in light of issues of support (such as mentoring) and resources.

Quality of worklife is paramount to faculty members' performance (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002) and their perceptions of quality of life (Johnsrud & Heck, 1998). Professional priorities and rewards, administrative relations and support, and the quality of benefits and services are among the dimensions that define the quality of faculty worklife. It appears that morale is tied to these dimensions. Morale seems to be the component of quality of worklife that influences satisfaction and ultimately whether a faculty member decides to leave a university (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). Because the quality of worklife is tied closely to worklife satisfaction and retention, it is important for faculty developers to consider these components of faculty worklife and foster a balance between the professional and personal lives of faculty, as Sorcinelli (2000) stated.

Methods

To address the concerns of mentoring and work/home balance, among other common faculty concerns, a questionnaire was developed based on the outcomes of small semi-structured faculty focus groups about improving the work environment, which resulted from a faculty-wide call for participation. The questionnaire was then administered to the full faculty. Using an online survey tool, the questionnaire included questions designed to address the themes identified in the focus groups, as well as demographic questions. This questionnaire was sent to the 559 members of the faculty at our university. One-hundred and thirty faculty members responded to the questionnaire, eliciting 104 complete questionnaires for a valid response rate of 18.6%.

The three dependent variables are *department*, *college*, and *university*. Each of these variables is based on the same base question: "I am supported by my ___ (department, college, or university) to be able to do all aspects of my job well." These responses were recoded into accurate (1) and not accurate (0). There are two primary independent variables: *balance* and *mentoring. Balance* was defined as faculty perception of university support for a home/work life balance. *Mentoring* was defined as faculty perception of university support for mentoring activities. Additionally, three demographic variables were included in the analyses: *sex/gender*, *ethnicity*, and *length of time employed.*

The data were analyzed to determine the relationship between our independent and dependent variables. A series of regression analyses were estimated for the three dependent variables. For each of the dependent variables, logistic regressions were used to predict perceived level of support from department, college, and university related to the item: "to do all aspects of my job well." Models were estimated (results not shown) using the independent and demographic variables to predict each of the three dependent variables.

Results

While 130 faculty members completed a portion of the questionnaire, 104 valid and complete responses were recorded. The demographic results described below include only respondents who had complete responses to the questionnaire. Fifty percent of the sample has worked at the university for 10 years or fewer, with 21% of faculty in the sample having worked at the university for more than 20 years. Sixty-one percent reported their gender as female, 34% reported as male, and 5% reported that they preferred not to answer. No participants identified as intersex, transgender, or another gender non-conforming response. Eighty-one percent reported their ethnicity as non-Hispanic white, whereas 11% reported that they preferred not to answer. Half of the sample indicated their rank as Assistant or Associate Professors, a third are Full Professors, and the remainder are faculty not on the tenure track. About a third reported teaching in our largest college, Liberal Arts, while another third teach in the Colleges of Education and Nursing and Health Sciences. There were no significant gender differences in length of employment, college, or rank. The distribution of ethnicity among our sample is not large enough to conduct similar bivariate analyses.

Approximately one-quarter of the respondents strongly agree or agree with each of the following: they perceive support for faculty mentoring (26%) and that the university supports faculty in a work/home balance (27%). Faculty members were asked to rate how accurate the following statements were: "I am supported by my department/college/university to be able to do all aspects of my job well." Responses of "very accurate" and "accurate" were combined, and "not at all accurate," "somewhat accurate" and "neutral" were combined. Approximately half of respondents reported being supported by their departments to be able to do all aspects of their job well. Slightly less than half (43%) feel supported by their

college to do all aspects of their job well, and one-third (35%) feel supported by the university to do all aspects of their job well.

Multivariate regression (results not shown) was used to predict each of the three dependent variables. For the first statement, "I am supported by my department to be able to do all aspects of my job well," none of the demographic variables significantly predicted agreement. However, perceived support for mentoring was a significant predictor (1.048, $p<.001$). For the second statement, "I am supported by my college to be able to do all aspects of my job well," the only significant predictor of agreement is perceived support for work/home balance. Similarly, for the third statement, "I am supported by the university to be able to do all aspects of my job well," only perceived support for work/home balance significantly predicts agreement.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors related to perceived support from three levels of administrative structure (department, college, and university) in order for faculty to do their jobs well. Overall, one-quarter of faculty agreed with each of the items suggesting that there was moderate university support for mentoring and that the university supported faculty's work/home balance. In these two areas, there appears to be an underwhelming level of support perceived by faculty. Additionally, half of faculty perceived support from their department, 42% perceived support from their college, and 35% perceived support from the university to do all aspects of their job well. This is an indicator that faculty at this university tend to feel more supported by structures closer to them (i.e., departments more than colleges, and colleges more than the university), which supports Johnsrud and Heck's (1994) work. In predicting perceived departmental support, mentoring was the only significant variable across four models. However, at the college and university levels, perceived support for faculty work/home balance significantly predicted faculty's ability to do their job well.

In order for faculty to do their job well, an effective faculty development program is necessary. Mentoring and work/home balance are certainly two components of such a program. Previous research has clearly suggested that appropriate mentoring needs to be individualized (Sorcinelli, 2000) and flexible (Davis et al., 2003). A mentoring program also needs to be systematic, as naturally occurring mentoring does not often occur for some groups (i.e., women and faculty of color) (Boyle & Boice, 1998). It is also important for faculty members, administrators, and institutions alike to understand the connection between faculty satisfaction (and ultimately professional success) and the balance of worklife and homelife (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). Unfortunately, specific solutions to the imbalance between work and homelife are not obvious and likely require a paradigm shift in higher education. However, it is recommended that department heads, deans, and other administrators consider the effects of mentoring and other forms of support (such as family leave, sick time, personal days, buyout time for curriculum development, research funding, leadership opportunities, and time for collaborations) on recruitment, development, and retention of faculty. This consideration should take into account the unique needs and issues of faculty and universities.

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Further emphasizing Sorcinelli's (2000) point regarding the need for individualized connections, research suggests that faculty development programs, more broadly, also need to reflect institutional identity (Davis et al., 2003). As institutions consider faculty development programming, it is important to acknowledge that much of the previous research and best practices were completed at research-focused universities. Our university, however, is an undergraduate, teaching-focused state university. Research-heavy institutions typically prioritize

scholarship over teaching and service, whereas teaching institutions often prioritize teaching and service over scholarship. Hence, most of the research conceptualizes "satisfaction" of work and faculty development resources in terms of the ability to complete scholarship rather than to teach effectively. Matier (1990) suggests that perceived support and satisfaction are often related to issues such as administrative support (in the forms of graduate assistants and clerical support) and rewards (often defined by salary and grant support). These forms of support are not readily available at most teaching institutions.

While much of the research in this area focuses on research intensive universities, there are still some broad recommendations for consideration in the design of faculty development programs for all types of institutions, bearing in mind that programs should be tailored to the faculty unique to each university. First, faculty development programs need to be faculty-driven (Davis et al., 2003; Eble & McKeachie, 1985). When faculty members are an integral part of the creation of faculty development programs, they feel ownership over them. Second, having administrative support is necessary to provide required resources and to acknowledge the legitimacy of faculty development as an effective use of faculty time. Davis and colleagues (2003) recommend faculty development as a permanent structure (with permanent space and regularly available resources) that is embedded in the identity of the institution. Finally, the structure of the programming should be broad and flexible, allowing faculty to choose components of the programming that meet their professional goals.

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In conclusion, mentoring and work/home balance are important aspects of faculty's perception of support for doing their job well, as well as their perceived ability to do so. These factors impact faculty satisfaction, which in turn affects faculty development, productivity, and retention. Thus, it is imperative that universities evaluate their practices related to mentoring and expectations related to worklife for their impact on homelife and vice versa, in order to insure that faculty perceives support to perform all aspects of their job well.

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